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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EPET](#) [ECON](#) [SENV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: DESPITE HEALTH RISKS, NIGER DELTANS LIVE,
SWIM IN CRUDE FROM SPILLS

Sensitive But Unclassified; Handle Accordingly

11. (SBU) Summary: During his February 1-19 visit to Lagos, U.S. Science Fellow (USFF) and Environmental Protection Agency Federal On-Scene Coordinator Michael Solecki taught over 30 working level officers of the Nigerian Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) advanced techniques for dealing with oil spills. Solecki noted that the health impacts of exposure to the benzene, toluene and xylene in crude oil are well known, and include a range of cancers, as well as asthma and blood diseases; children are at particular risk. NOSDRA Environmental Scientists from Warri and Port Harcourt described how communities in the Niger Delta live in the oil spills, walking through the oil daily. One NOSDRA scientist said he had seen young boys "swimming in the crude" topping the water of a creek. In response to questions, the NOSDRA officials estimated that on average three oil spills take place every day in the Niger Delta; the total number of spills reported by their agency annually is from 1,250-1,300, although the area covered by the spills is not known. Satellite mapping can reveal the extent of contamination, and oil can be recovered from aquifers, USSF said. End Summary.

12. (SBU) From February 1-19, USSF and Environmental Protection Agency Federal On-Scene Coordinator Michael Solecki taught over 30 working level officers of the Nigerian Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) advanced techniques for dealing with oil spills. Solecki also met with local environmentalists and officials of international oil companies (IOCs) (Septels).

Niger Delta Indigenes "Live In" Oil Spills

13. (SBU) During a dinner February 13 at the home of Pol-Econ Chief, Warri and Port Harcourt NOSDRA officials told USSF, ESTHoff and Poloffs that the people of the Niger Delta do not just live near the oil spills, they literally "live in them, walking through them daily". An Environmental Scientist employed at the Port Harcourt NOSDRA office said he constantly sees the people of villages located near spills walking through the oil on the ground. His colleague, an Environmental Scientist from the Warri NOSDRA office, agreed; when he conducted an investigation of a spill in a community near Warri, he came upon a group of young boys "swimming in the crude."

14. (SBU) Asked the potential impact of exposure on the population, USSF, while noting that he is not a physician, explained that the health effects of exposure to the benzene, toluene and xylene in crude oil are well known, and include a range of cancers, including of the lungs, liver, kidney, and colon, as well as asthma, blood diseases, mongoloidism and premature births. Children are at particular risk because their short stature places them in the heaviest concentration of the vapor zone, which can rise from seven to eight feet above the exposed crude oil, the Science Fellow said.

Satellite Mapping Could Reveal Extent of Spills

15. (SBU) In response to questions, the NOSDRA officials estimated that on an average three oil spills take place every day in the Niger Delta; the total number of spills reported by their agency annually is from 1,250-1,300, they said. The total area covered by spills is not known, however, nor what communities are affected, the NOSDRA Environmental Scientists said. Asked whether remote assessments of the presence of oil from spills could be done, USSF responded that information from oil companies about the stratigraphy of their fields, coupled with measurements from areas free of spills, might provide sufficient information to allow satellite mapping of areas affected by oil spills. Oil fingerprinting is a technology that allows matching oil from a spill to the oil originating in any given well, the USSF said.

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Oil Recovery "Cleans" Aquifer

16. (SBU) USSF recounted his experiences as Chief Recovery Officer tasked with cleaning up the site of numerous oil spills in the United States. Many oil refineries in New Jersey and elsewhere across the United States are currently dealing with a legacy of 100 years of spills that have affected the soil, aquifer and ground water of the areas surrounding them. The projects reclaiming oil from ground water provide the community with safe drinking water, and are neither extremely complicated technologically, nor extremely expensive to execute, USSF asserted. Moreover, the oil that is reclaimed, while degraded, continues to have value and can be sold at a profit, he noted. In one project in which he was involved, of 160,000 gallons of oil spilled, fully 90,000 gallons was able to be recovered; the remainder of the oil is immobile and remains trapped in the soil.

17. (U) This cable was cleared by USSF and coordinated with Embassy Abuja.
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